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The last half decade has been a political rollercoaster in Cambodia leaving no aspects of social and political life unaffected. Since 2017, Cambodia is undergoing hardening authoritarianism led by incumbent Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which, in power in different guises ever since 1979, since 2018 is the only party represented in the National Assembly. In political science analysis, Cambodia might only have crossed a thin, almost cosmetic line from electoral to hegemonic authoritarianism (Morgenbesser, 2019), but the case of Cambodia makes clear just how significant that distinction nonetheless is. Now that Cambodia has embarked on an openly authoritarian path, the regime is gradually changing its identity. While a multi-party formula is maintained in form, the very notion of politics is changing from an emphasis on contestation to one on consensus. Freedom of association and expression is severely restricted by repression of social movements and the intimidation of land right activists by the state (Schoenberger and Beban, 2018). Moreover, in line with developments in nearby Singapore, Malaysia, and Philippines, and perhaps the region as a whole (Rodan, 2018), expanding political participation through state-sponsored avenues serves to constrain contestation. Not only is there an increased stress on civil society partnership with the government, but new forms of mass mobilisation are emerging under the direction of the CPP, prompting independent social actors to seek new forms of engagement with the state.

The political fracas which crystallised into hardening authoritarianism began in 2013, when the political opposition significantly challenged the CPP in elections. This merely brought to the surface what had long been a highly questioned relationship between the state and its citizens: questions that had been teeming for decades framed and reframed by social movements and land activists. The emergence of a strong opposition force had the effect of popularising and mainstreaming an alternative narrative of citizenship with nationwide reach and widespread legitimacy (Norén-Nilsson, 2016). It is safe to say that the current repressive climate does violence to a politically and socially awakened electorate. The effect is difficult to estimate. Cambodia's young demographic profile, in which almost two-thirds of the population are under thirty years of age (UNDP, 2018), is a key factor shaping state-society relations (Eng and Hughes, 2017). It is, however in itself no guarantee for social and political renewal, particularly since the young generation is a particular target of government efforts for mobilisation and recruitment.

The purpose of this collection of articles is to pause to take stock of the role of contemporary social movements in negotiating change in relations between the state and

its citizens, now that we are venturing into a new authoritarian context. Three of four case studies are focused on land conflicts with their own distinct and complex chronologies, stretching back in some cases to the early 2000s. However, the fieldwork the analysis builds on has been concentrated over the last few years.

Access to and control over land are prevailing concerns for a significant section of the rural and urban population (Biddulph and Williams, 2017; Hirsch and Scurrah, 2015). Land conflicts and evictions are estimated to have affected no fewer than 770,000 people during the period 2000–2013 (ADHOC, 2014). In 2015, the NGO Forum on Cambodia (2015) reported that 77 per cent of the 352 land disputes which erupted between 1990 and 2014 remained unresolved. Land tenure security for the majority of small farmers and constructive collaboration between the government and civil society remain two faraway references (ADHOC, 2015; Landau, 2008).

The different land dispute resolution mechanisms are largely ineffective, notoriously known to be politically biased and usually unaffordable for smallholder famers, and negotiation between equal parties is not on the government agenda. In this context, land security and the promotion of grass-roots dialogue represent nothing but a long-term societal project, at best an ideal that the majority of the Cambodians hardly imagine as concretely feasible (Un and So, 2011). The lack of land security for the peasants and other smallholders (Neef et al., 2013) continues to create a deep sense of uncertainty among a silenced population (Ou and Kim, 2013). Moreover, many investments have been accused of causing social conflict and injustice, negatively impacting natural resources and environment (Schoenberger, 2017), and causing landlessness and other socio-economic issues (Milne and Mahanty, 2015; Young, 2016a, 2016b). Here and there, however, groups and networks of people raise their voices to challenge the imposed socio-economic order (Bourdier, 2016; Young, 2016c). Various social movements by affected grass-roots communities have emerged in response, sometimes supported by local and international NGOs.

Another theme that is pursued below is the questioning of the very forms that social and political mobilisation should take, which has arguably been central to citizenship negotiations in Cambodia over the past few years. Following 2013, political infighting between the two main political parties gave rise to a reaction against elite politics and the birth of an agenda to promote grass-roots leadership. This re-evaluation of the role of grass-roots has led some activists to seek to erase the boundaries between the arenas of civil society and electoral politics. We therefore posit that a proper understanding of Cambodian citizenship negotiations today necessitates examining the most recent period in terms of shifting notions of the respective roles of grass-roots activists, formal civil society organisations, and political parties.

The Articles

This special issue gathers a set of deeply empirically informed case studies so as to take stock of the political functions and roles of social movements in today's Cambodia. Three of four case studies analyse the winding trajectories followed by various chains of

actors claiming rights to land. The four case studies portray heterogeneous situations: some movements are purely grass-roots oriented, others are associated with transnational networks, while others still lobby financial corporations. The articles inquire into the multiple reasons motivating these actors to be politically engaged and the consequences of their choices. They also seek to shed light on the multifaceted factors associated with shifting outcomes of their initial engagement.

In their article, Jean-Christophe Diepart, Ngin Chanrith, and Il Oeur seek to elicit agency among Cambodian farmers who struggling against economic state land concessions negotiate with state authorities and market actors. They conceptualise state land management as a "dynamic process that combines a calculus by authorities to retain social legitimacy and reproduce their sovereign power in respect of land." Consequently, conflicts over state land signify nothing short of a rupture between the state and land rights-claiming farmers. The authors compare three cases of struggles in northern Cambodia when state land cultivated by smallholder farmers was encroached upon, in which the employment of different resolution mechanisms and varying relationships between stakeholders have yielded different outcomes. In Oddar Meanchey, the collective and coordinated strategy of NGOs, in tandem with advocacy campaigns targeting international influencers, led to the sugar companies withdrawing and the cancellation of their concession contracts; yet, it is unclear what will become of the land. In Taing Mlou, Ratanakiri, Jarai villagers safeguarded their village from the incursions of a mining company by categorically declining to engage with the company and local authorities. In Khseum, Kratie, villagers mobilised authorities at multiple levels, the political elite, and NGOs. Here, tensions were exacerbated by the failure to speak with one voice and the issue remains partly unresolved. The authors find that conflict management occurs through hybrid institutions, as the conflict transformation processes produce "contingent rules" that are the specific outcomes of negotiations between actors. Despite the overall shrinking space of contestation, they find that these "contingent rules" provide opportunities for resistance and negotiation with the possibility for smallholder farmers to successfully protect their land resources.

Sokphea Young explores the role of protest movements of grass-roots communities and NGOs in influencing environmental governance from the viewpoint of environmental accountability. Worldwide, the absence of clear mechanisms for identifying whom government and corporations are accountable to with regard to environmental governance is considered to be a factor contributing to environmental deterioration. Young explores the ways in which Cambodian protest movements seek to hold government and foreign corporations accountable for environmental degradation, by a close analysis of two case studies which have generated persistent protests over time – against both the government and the corporations. These are a joint movement against sugar industry, which has been going on for more than a decade, and protests against the Stung Cheay Areng dam project, starting in 2014. The joint movement against sugar industry in the three provinces of Koh Kong, Kampong Speu, and Oddar Meanchey aims to directly influence corporations, though government intervention remains necessary to ensure this end goal. Here, the sugarcane corporations as well as the government have adjusted their behaviour, although they cannot be said to be truly accountable to the grass-roots

communities and NGOs. In Stung Cheay Areng valley, the advocacy of grass-roots communities strongly supported by NGOs has targeted the government, putting pressure on it to abandon the plan for hydropower development. Although the future of the area remains uncertain, the proposed dam has so far been adjourned. This leads Young to conclude that Cambodian protest movements of affected communities and NGOs are influential in requiring environmental accountability from both government and corporations.

Frédéric Bourdier turns to analyse what happens when villagers lobby not only the state, nor companies directly – but an international financial institution. Bourdier takes his case study from northeastern Ratanakiri province, where Vietnamese private company HAGL was granted a vast economic land concession in a territory home to several ethnic groups. Some of the funding for this company came from the World Bank through its private sector agency, the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Starting in 2009, the discovery by villagers in fourteen rural settlements of the company's intrusion provoked a prompt response, what Bourdier calls the "birth of an independent social movement." By 2013, international and national NGOs then swayed the villagers to adopt an alternative approach: calling for international mediation by IFC watchdog the Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO). CAO was to facilitate a neutral mediation so as to reach an agreement between the parties. Yet Bourdier finds that the technical and apolitical institutionalised mediation has been to the disadvantage of villagers, attributable primarily to an evident power imbalance between 6,000 villagers supported by five NGOs on the one hand, and a Vietnamese private conglomerate backed by an arsenal of communication specialists, managers, technical consultants, jurists, high-ranking Cambodian officers, private banks, and intermediary funds, on the other. At the time of writing, the outcome of mediation had "metastized into a deceptive, 'wait-and-see', technically biased mediation, leaving the villagers misled, confused and disorganized." The costly and time-consuming mediation process (early 2014 to end 2018) has also contributed to damaging local socio-political organisation, amplifying socio-economic inequalities, and increasing tensions and human conflicts in quite a few villages.

Shifting the analytical focus to the nexus between grass-roots mobilisation and electoral politics, Astrid Norén-Nilsson examines the figure of Kem Ley, a political commentator and grass-roots organiser, and a civil society-propelled grass-roots democracy movement he helped breathe life into. The central question she pursues is what notions of citizenship and political leadership associated with Kem Ley and the grass-roots democracy movement surfaced during Cambodia's brief democratic momentum from 2013 to 2017 – and why not more came out of these. The 2016 murder of Kem Ley turned him into a nationally beloved icon of democracy, but in local and national elections the two subsequent years, the political party he co-founded failed to appeal to the electorate. This paradox is explored from the point of view of citizenship and the status of political parties and individual leaders. It is argued that the Cambodian grass-roots democracy movement came about in response to a legitimacy crisis among traditional political parties, which prompted civil society veterans to venture into the arena of electoral politics. The resulting grass-roots democracy movement set out to systematically gather civil society leaders in a

political party, which would operate according to civil society logics. Yet, this has failed to convince voters, who, it is argued, though they may be attracted to Kem Ley's model of citizenship, have not been swayed by the resulting apolitical party. Cambodian grass-roots activists seeking to further democracy by engaging in electoral politics thus play a different role, making more modest democratic contributions, compared to other countries in the region. Unlike in Malaysia, they stake a "neutral" middle path rather than an oppositional one, and unlike in Indonesia, they do so while engaging in electoral politics with a sitting electoral authoritarian regime. The party's democratic impact in the new authoritarian context will therefore depend on its utility to the ruling CPP.

This collection of articles thus probes into the roles, and the limits, of current social movements, shedding light on their diverse functions and outcomes. Diepart, Ngin, and Oeur suggest that despite the overall shrinking space of contestation in Cambodia, there are still opportunities for resistance and negotiation with the possibility for smallholder farmers to successfully protect their land resources. While comparison between their three case studies is complicated by the fact that they differ from each other in involving different ethnic groups, in the villages having different levels of in-migration affecting social cohesion, and in involving investment companies from different countries in the Mekong region, it nonetheless reveals that opportunities for negotiation can be created. The authors propose that land conflict management takes place through institutional pluralism in cases in which a political opportunity structure has opened, and the affected community organises collective action and receives support from their social networks. The involved actors mobilise hard law, statutory, and customary norms, including patronage networks and perceptions of justice, when working their way around "contingent rules." Land transformation processes are consequently marked by non-linearity and complexity. Similarly, Sokphea Young finds that while it is unlikely that the government will acknowledge adverse consequences of their policy decisions in the current authoritarian context, the government can still be held accountable by pressure to correct policy implementation. The protest movements of grass-roots communities and NGOs he focuses on have been increasingly influential in holding government and corporations accountable for environmental impact. In Stung Chay Areng, it has held the government accountable by leveraging environmental accountability as a national interest. The joint movement against sugar industry has put pressure on the government and corporations by targeting individual corporations directly through an international supply chain approach, influencing the government to intervene.

By contrast, Frédéric Bourdier's study of grass-roots communities employing established conflict resolution mechanisms to lobby the IFC suggests that this strategy is disempowering villagers. The mediation process made villagers less operational insofar they were constantly advised to take conciliatory positions. The proposed peaceful solution now shows its real effect which, according to the author, is "nothing more than a sticking plaster over a major wound." In his analysis, there is a clear divide between the role of grass-roots organising themselves as an independent social movement and that of NGOs, which are complicit in the demise of that social movement. But were there any

other realistic options? NGOs, navigating the great difficulties they face in the current political climate in which they are suspected of oppositional tendencies, seek to steer clear of open confrontation with power holders and their allies. The unintended consequence has been to annihilate popular political anger and depoliticise resistance. Moreover, this very particular case illustrates, according to the author, the ways in which some NGOs perpetuate the logic of colonialism by attempting to tell people what to do, rather than letting the people themselves guide their objectives. And indigenous people have eventually accepted, probably more by constraint than by choice, to follow the objectives of their advocates. The logic of domination continues to be perpetuated in spite of a sociopolitical reconfiguration of the actors involved in the resolution of this massive land conflict. Not really a matter of surprise: one of the main efforts of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been to demonstrate that domination, either by the state or by another influential entity, never works so well as when it receives a kind of implicit complicity of the dominated (Bourdieu, 2000, 2001).

From the vantage point of the intersection between civil society and electoral politics, Astrid Norén-Nilsson's study shines light on the possibilities and limitations pertaining to each arena. In her analysis, the grass-roots democracy agenda brings into view the possibilities to cross-navigate between formal politics and civil society activity available to activists in Cambodia as various modes of participation. She argues that political parties, marred by a legitimacy crisis, play an uneasy role for channelling today's political energies in Cambodia – prompting civil society activists to seek to reshape citizenship by promoting grass-roots leadership. Yet more telling still, the fact that this agenda has been pushed primarily through a political party nonetheless points back to the limitations inherent to civil society work and the perceived primacy of electoral politics for real impact.

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